

Bowles Rice VIEWS & VISIONS

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Rich Yohe
Easley & Rivers

Rich Yohe is the President of Easley & Rivers, a union interior subcontractor and construction services firm headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Yohe got his start in the construction industry as an estimator and took on a variety of roles with different companies before joining Easley & Rivers in 1999. Today, the company's area of operation has grown to include an eight-state region. Over the course of six decades, Easley & Rivers' core expertise has grown beyond expert building and finishing to encompass total interior solutions and furnishings.

The Power of Pivoting

Just as the City of Pittsburgh has evolved over the course of the last decade, Easley & Rivers has been able to change to meet the needs of its clients in the construction industry. I began working for Easley and Rivers in 1999. Back then, construction in Pittsburgh, unlike the years to come, consisted of many public school building opportunities, along with once-in-a-career type projects such as Heinz Field, PNC Park, The Petersen Events Center and the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. Those projects, accompanied with the constant array of healthcare, office buildings and university projects, kept the majority of the 2000s busy in the construction industry.

In 2008, the housing crash put a significant strain on construction in Pittsburgh. Loans for owners were much harder to get approved, and work became very scarce. Two noteworthy developments that helped save the construction economy during that time frame were the shale rush and the reconfiguration



of student housing. The shale rush for Easley & Rivers translated to work that was mostly comprised of office buildings or office fit-out work, for which we were well prepared. The reconfiguration of student housing from dormitory-style living to apartment-style living was the driving factor for Easley & Rivers to add wood-framed panelization to its portfolio. Now, in addition to drywall, finishing,





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and insulation for student housing projects, we were also doing the wood framing of the buildings. Being one of the few subcontractors in the city able to finance and staff these sizeable projects helped keep our volume in line and enabled us to successfully ride out the recession of 2008.

When oil prices crashed, which stalled the shale rush, and the student housing renovation process wrapped up, a new era took over. That new era was driven by the technology class. Carnegie Mellon University was a major contributor for tech companies with the desire to have an office in Pittsburgh. Companies such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Uber, Intel, and Amazon wanted to be close to the talent pool at CMU. The opportunities

that were created as a result of these companies opening offices in Pittsburgh were, and continue to be, substantial. The transformation of East Liberty due to the presence of these tech companies brought office buildings, office fit-outs, apartment buildings, townhomes, and retail. Lawrenceville has also undergone a major transformation, in part due to the growth of the tech companies. Easley & Rivers was involved in many of these projects, and these tech companies helped pull Pittsburgh out of a recession.

In the late 2010s/early 2020s, a new bid delivery method was implemented, and Easley & Rivers once again pivoted. The Design Assist method for subcontractors is still a new concept and has been used by E&R in several different applications.

However, the overall team concept remains consistent, and finding value in letting the experts help take part in the design to find efficiencies and cost savings is a constant factor as well. The purest and most significant DA Project we have worked on was the AHN Wexford Hospital. With over a year of team meetings and pricing, we were brought to contract on budget and with a thorough understanding of our scope, our fellow subcontractors' scope, job schedules, safety protocols, jobsite logistics and more. This job was our single biggest contract and one that stayed on schedule for the entire team through completion, which is exceptionally noteworthy because this project encountered the pandemic during construction.

Perhaps the most innovative part of this project was the multi-trade corridor racking system. The majority of the hospital's corridors were built off site as the structure of the building was being built. The MEP and drywall contractors prefabricated approximately 4,500 linear feet of corridor offsite, then transported the prefabricated corridors to the jobsite and lifted them into place. Each piece was about 30 feet in length, complete with framing, drywall, electrical, plumbing and HVAC requirements. The time and money that was saved by building these racks offsite helped the project budget. The coordination and planning that were involved to make this happen could only be achieved by a delivery method such as Design Assist.

The talent in the field and in the office allows Easley & Rivers to adapt and pivot with the challenges and changes in our industry. The company is blessed with so many hard working, dedicated and talented individuals. Our team has enabled us to survive the tough times and thrive during the good times. We look forward to the growth that the future will bring to Easley & Rivers and the region we call home. **▼**